IMPROVE YOUR SIGHT WITHOUT GLASSES

A few minutes of simple exercises a day have restored practically normal eyesight to thousands

by Lawrence Galton

DR. WILLIAM H. BATES threw a bombshell into the ophthalmological world 35 years ago with the publication of *Perfect Sight Without Glasses*. It has been exploding in a chain reaction ever since.

Bates meant exactly what the title said—even though it seemed impossible. He was a practicing New York eye specialist who developed a theory which violated about every orthodox idea of how we see, why we lose sight—and what can be done to regain it without reliance upon glasses as the sole corrective.

Bates' ideas were originally dismissed as utter foolishness, and are still being vigorously discussed pro and con. But, according to those who use and have improved upon Bates' techniques, they have brought normal or practically normal sight to scores of thousands of people long considered hopelessly nearsighted or farsighted, or otherwise afflicted and forced to wear glasses the rest of their lives.

After a few months of practicing Bates' theory, a nearsighted woman with 1/10th normal vision, who had worn glasses for most of her life, passed a driver's test with 20/40 vision, wearing no glasses. Two years later, she passed it again with 20/20, or normal, vision.

A farsighted businessman, for whom print was only a blur without the glasses which he had worn for half a dozen years, was able to discard them in less than three months.

Miss Clara A. Hackett, an outstanding teacher, and author of the recently published book, *Relax and See* (written in collaboration with

Lawrence Galton and published by Harpers—Ed.), has added many techniques to increase the effectiveness of the original Bates methods and founded her own school. She and her trained instructors have helped not only nearsighted, farsighted and crossed-eye people but also more than 400 others with cataract, glaucoma and other eye ailments.

WHAT IS the Bates theory? In essence it is that, contrary to long-held belief, poor sight doesn't cause strain; rather, strain causes poor sight.

According to orthodox theory, you see near and far because the lens of your eye changes shape to focus light rays so they form a sharp image on the retina. If you look at something far away, the lens flattens. If you look at something nearby, it bulges.

Unfortunately, according to this theory, while the lens is remarkably elastic in youth, it gradually hardens with age, becoming less able to bulge and dooming most of us to "middle-aged" sight, or presbyopia. There's only one remedy—glasses to aid the natural lens. They're crutches—useful ones—but nothing more.

Bates, however, came to doubt this; and to doubt, in fact, the whole orthodox theory. For one thing, he had noticed that if a lens were removed surgically, the eye was still capable of some focusing for distances. How could you explain this in terms of the old theory? And how explain that visual capacity changed, even in normal eyes, when a person was ill or working under great tension or upset by emotional problems? He developed an entirely different theory that could explain all this.

If you're using a camera and want to take a close-up picture, you lengthen the distance between lens and film; you do the opposite for a distant shot. So with the eye, Bates held. Accommodation is accomplished by a change in the shape of the whole eyeball, rather than of the lens alone.

Six external muscles hold the eyeball in its socket and some of them also move the eye right, left, up and down, as you direct them. But they have another action, too. One set pulls back on the eyeball to flatten it for viewing distant objects; another lengthens the distance for near sight. If one set of muscles is too contracted, opposing the action of the other set, there's a loss in near or far sight.

What causes the over-contracted state? All muscles are activated by nerve impulses. Frequently, the impulses are set off by emotional stress. A tic is one example; a nervous stomach another.

So, Bates held, stress and strain may cause vision loss. It's actually almost a vicious cycle. When you're nervous and upset, you don't see well. And as you don't see well, you strain to see—peering, squinting, using trick vision. Eventually, you wind up producing your own eye troubles.

The techniques used by Bates and his followers aim at re-establishing

proper use of these muscles. And the cardinal principle is relaxation: the muscles are strained and clamped; relaxation is used to ease the strain and unclamp them.

You can't exercise them—not consciously—because they're not under conscious control. But once you get the tension out of them, get them fully relaxed, then you can get them working properly by practicing certain principles of good sight. As you practice these, automatically the muscles begin to function properly. No hard work is involved. You see better as you let your eyes see easily.

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE many techniques, here are some of the major ones:

SUNNING: On a sunny day, stand or seat yourself in front of a window and, with your eyes closed, turn your face to the sun. Or seat yourself comfortably in a chair about three feet away from a 10-watt light bulb, facing it with your eyes closed.

Keeping the lids closed, slowly move your head first toward one shoulder and then toward the other. The movement should be gentle and easy, with the neck and whole body relaxed.

Just a few minutes at a time is all that's necessary, and you'll notice a growing feeling of relaxation—in your eyes and, indeed, in your whole body. In addition, you may find that when you open your eyes after sunning, objects about you will appear a little sharper and clearer than they were before.

PALMING: After sunning, seat yourself comfortably in a chair and prop your elbows on a pillow or two held in your lap. Close your eyes and cover them with your cupped hands.

Let the heels of the palms rest lightly on the cheekbones, with the fingers of one hand resting on the forehead above the bridge of the nose and the fingers of the other hand crossed on top. The palms should not touch the eyes, the eyes should be lightly but not tightly closed, and there should be no tensing of fingers or brows.

The darkness coming after the light of sunning, plus the warmth from your hands, will give you a definite feeling that the eyes are relaxing still more.

SWINGING: Stand facing a window, with your feet about 12 inches apart, in an erect, easy posture, your hands hanging loosely at your sides. Gently, easily, swing your body to the left, shifting the weight on the feet so your right heel comes off the floor. Then swing to the right with your left heel rising, at the rate of a slow waltz.

As you swing from side to side, your eyes should follow a steady, eye-level, horizontal path. Don't stare. Blink occasionally, keep relaxed, and you'll soon get an illusion that as you swing in one direction, the room is revolving in the other. This is the basic "Long Swing" devised by Dr. Bates to help relax muscles not only in the eyes but also throughout the body.

MOBILITY DRILLS: If you have a sight loss, the chances are that you have a decided tendency to stare, trying to force yourself to see better. This does more than produce tension; it also adds to the sight loss.

For, when you fix your eyes on an object and try hard to pull it all into sight, you actually defeat yourself by using less sensitive areas of the retina.

Good sight, Bates instructors teach, is centralized sight, making use of the central sensitive portion of the retina. And it involves mobility. You see best when you try to see only a little at a time, moving quickly from one small portion of an object to other portions, until you've sighted the whole.

Mobility drills aim at re-establishing the habit of making sight mobile and centralized. One, for example, involves merely counting. Look around a room, turning your head and eyes from one picture to another, and count them. In the same way, count books, colors, furniture pieces, glasses on a shelf—it doesn't matter what, as long as you turn your head and eyes in the process in order to set your sight squarely on each object, allowing rays from it to center on the retina. Outdoors, you can count the windows in a building, the letters on a sign, the cars in a block, the people on the street.

ACCOMMODATION DRILLS: These involve practice in shifting vision between near and far to build up your ability to see equally well at all distances.

You can, for example, practice by looking from your wrist watch to a large clock in the distance, from a pencil in your hand to anything across the room. As you ride in a bus, you can look up from a line in a newspaper to a line on a sign in the bus or across the street.

In practicing accommodation you discard your glasses, as you do with all other practice, for short periods at a time. If you are nearsighted, you will not at once see objects clearly at a distance. Similarly, there'll be blurring in nearby ones if you're farsighted.

But gradually, as you continue the practice, you'll note improvement. For you will be viewing objects at bothersome distances in a new way—not just trying hard to see them in old ways.

Eyesight re-education is not, of course, a substitute for medical diagnosis and care. Bates teachers will not diagnose eyesight problems or diseases—and they do not treat them. Even if your problem is seemingly only nearsightedness or farsightedness, many request you to consult a doctor first to make certain no disease is present.

An increasing number of physicians now believe that the methods Bates originated, and the many others developed by teachers like Clara Hackett, help, because a lot of sight is mental—and tension may be a factor in the mind, if not in the muscles.

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